

THE MASTER OF MAN :-: By Sir Hall Caine

An Outspoken and Moving Study of a Deep Sex Problem by the Noted Author of "The Manxman," "The Deemster," "The Eternal City," "The Woman Thou Gavest Me," Etc.

PERSONS OF THE STORY

VICTOR STOWELL—A brilliant young advocate, appointed deputy Deemster, or chief Judge, of the Isle of Man, in which position he has to sit in judgment on a fellow-sinner. He is high principled and likable, though in a moment of mutual passion he has, to great later penitence over the secret sin, had illicit relations with

BESSIE COLLISTER—A handsome but illiterate peasant girl. She has a child which is accidentally smothered on the night of his birth. She is arrested for murdering her babe. Bessie really loves

ALICK GELL—A respectable but somewhat specious man who persuades Bessie to wed herself to him despite the opposition of his father.

SPEAKER GELL—The rich and tyrannical head of the Manx Parliament.

FENELLA STANLEY—A great-hearted and beautiful girl with advanced ideas on women's rights who is in love with Victor and he with her. She is the daughter of,

GENERAL STANLEY—Governor of the Isle of Man.

DAN BALDROMMA—A brutal farmer, stepfather of Bessie, and who tries to use her trouble, for which he thinks Gell is responsible, as a lever to advance his own fortune.



Stowell knew that his feelings as a man were getting the better of his duty as a Judge.

Stowell, in spite of Dr. Clucas, got up next morning. He was sitting before the fire in the library when Janet came in to say that Mrs. Collister of Baldromma was asking to see the Deemster. She had come to plead for her daughter—that girl who was to be tried for killing her baby.

"I told her she shouldn't have come here and that the old Deemster would never have seen her. But it's pitiful to see the poor thing. She is lame, too, and has walked all the way. What am I to say to her?"

Stowell struggled with himself for a moment, and then, with an embarrassed utterance, said:

"Let her come in."

"This is very wrong of you, Mrs. Collister," (he was trying to keep a firm lip and to speak severely); "you know it is against all rule."

The old woman, trembling and wiping her eyes, said she knew it was, but she had known his father. There had been none like him—no, not the whole island over. He had been every poor person's friend. If anybody had been injured she had only to draw to him for refuge and he had protected her. And if any poor girl had gone wrong, and broken the law, perhaps, it was the big man himself who was always there to show her mercy.

"The why I thought maybe his son, if he had his father's heart—and people are saying he has, too—maybe his son wouldn't send a poor mother away when she's in trouble and has nobody else to go to."

"Sit down, Mrs. Collister."

The old woman sat in the chair which

Honor, except them that has gone through it."

Then she wiped her eyes, one after another, and said she could not sleep "a wink on the night," lying in her white bed and thinking of Bessie where she was now. And having read "in class" last evening how the Lord heard the cry of Hagar for her son in the wilderness she had thought his Honor might hear her cry for her daughter.

Stowell knew that his feelings as a man were getting the better of his duty as a Judge, so he tried to be severe with the old woman, telling her she had no right to come to him, and that he had done wrong to listen to her.

"In fact, I could not have received you at all but for one thing—I am not going to try your daughter's case."

"The old woman was appalled. It had done her wrong to listen to her."

"No, Deemster Taubman will probably do so."

That the old woman broke into a flood of tears.

"Aw dear! Aw dear! And me praying on my knees on the kitchen floor that the Lord would bring you back in time from the man who's being so hard on poor girls in trouble!"

Again Stowell was silent, and for some moments nothing was heard but the woman's broken sobs. At length unable to bear any longer the sight of the old mother's disappointment, he said he would do what he could for her. If he could not sit on her daughter's case he would write to Deemster Taubman, explaining her condition and describing her temptations.

"God bless you for that," cried the old woman. And then Janet said it was time to go, his Honor being unwell.

"May the Lord give him health and strength and long life, ma'am."

People were right when they were telling her he had his father's heart. He had, too. She was going out of the room with hope kindled, when she said:

"You must excuse a poor woman if she did wrong in coming to you, sir."

"We'll say no more about that now," said Stowell. "Go home and rest, mother."

At that word the old woman broke down utterly. But after a moment her weak eyes shone and she said:

"May the Lord give you health and strength and long life, ma'am."

"No, no," she must never do that," said Stowell. "Come now, Mrs. Collister," said Janet.

But having reached the door, the old woman turned her wet face, and seeing the portrait of Stowell's mother on the wall, and mistaking it for that of Fenella, she said:

"They're telling me you're to be married soon, your honor. May the Lord give you peace and love in your own home, and that's better than gold or lands, sir."

Stowell tried to reply, but he could only wave his hand and turn to the window as the old woman left the room. Why not? What sin against God would it be to unite this suffering

woman to her suffering daughter, if he could do so without wronging justice? A moment afterward Janet came back wiping her eyes.

"Oh, these mothers! They're fit enough to break one's heart, Victor."

III

Stowell was in the dining room the next day when he heard the clatter of a horse's hoofs on the drive, and a moment later a voice in the hall saying:

"The Deemster will see me, Jane."

It was Allick Gell. His tall figure was more bent than usual; his hair was disordered; his eyes glittered; he was deeply agitated.

"Excuse me, old fellow. You know how I've not been here before. It's because I'm busy every hour getting up her case. Awful, isn't it? I can't make myself believe it even yet. Sometimes in the middle of the night I hear Stowell crying 'Good God, it can't be true!'"

Stowell could scarcely find voice to reply. He remembered what he had advised Fenella to get Gell to do. Had he not told him?

"I received Fenella's letter and of course I am taking up the defense. I've seen Bessie, too, and arranged everything. She's innocent, and I'll fight for her to the last breath in my body. But Bessie here—read this," he said, dragging a crumpled newspaper from his pocket, and handing it to Stowell with a trembling hand.

It was a copy of the day's insular paper, containing a paragraph which said that the continued illness of the new Deemster would probably prevent him from presiding at the forthcoming sitting of the Court of General Gaol Delivery.

"That's the first edition. When it was published at 12 o'clock I couldn't wait until the afternoon train, so I hurried over to the Deemster's office, and I've galloped all the way. Don't tell me it's a true."

Stowell answered in a low tone that perhaps it might have to be, whereupon Gell made a cry of dismay.

"Then God help my poor girl! It will be Taubman, and she'll not have a dog's chance with him."

Taubman was a brute—especially in cases of his kind. What did people say about him—that when he saw a woman in the dock he was like a cat who had seen a rat? It was true. He was always bullying over the juries who showed humanity to girls in trouble.

"The infernal old blockhead! He has rheumatism in the legs, they say. I wish to heaven he had it in his throat, and it would choke him."

And then the barbarous old statute! Practically repealed in every other country, but still capable of operation in the Isle of Man. Think of it! Five years, ten years, fifteen years—ever death itself, perhaps!

"Stowell, we are old chums * * * it's not right of me, I know that * * * but for the sake of our old friendship, sit on Bessie's case yourself."

Stowell felt as if he were on the edge of a precipice. A bygone day lay before him at the next step. With an awning secret in his heart he felt that it was almost impossible to speak one word more without betraying himself. He was silent for a moment while Gell stood over him with wild eyes which he had never seen before. At length he said:

"Bessie is to plead not guilty?"

"Certainly."

"Will she stick to that?"

"Undoubtedly. Why shouldn't she? Besides, she has given me her promise."

Again Stowell was silent for a mo-

ment; then he said:

"I cannot promise to conduct the case, but if Taubman will do so, and I'm fit to sit with him, I'll * * * I'll see she has a fair trial."

"That's good enough for me. Just like you, old fellow."

He snatched up his cap—a different man in a moment.

"I must get back to town now. I have the witnesses to arrange for. Not too many of them, unfortunately. There's the mother, she's all right, but not likely to be good for the box. I'm not calling the stepfather. It seems he's giving the case away in the glee. The damned old blockhead! I should like to break his ugly neck. I jolly well will, too, one of these days. But Bessie will clear herself. Since she's going to be my wife she must leave the court without a stain. Good-by and God bless you, old chap. * * * No, no, don't come to the door. (Stowell was for seeing him out.) 'Take care of yourself. Good men are scarce. And then you've got to be fit for court, you know. By your leave!'"

Stowell watched him from the window as he rode down the drive on his tired horse, patting its neck and encouraging it with cheery cries.

Now he understood why Bessie had held off while Gell had wished to marry her. It had been a case of the wife of the Peat fisherman over again, with the difference that Bessie (to avoid the danger of deceiving her husband) had made away with her child before marriage instead of after it. Wild, foolish, frantic scheme! Yet what courage! What strength! What affection!

But if, under Taubman's searching questions, the conspiracy of love should fall, and Bessie's defense should collapse, and Gell should see that she had deceived him, and that he too had deceived her, what would he do? After all, what outrage on justice would it be to keep a case like this out of the hands of a cold-blooded, inhuman legal machine who would commit more crime than he punished?

Still standing by the window, Stowell heard the clatter of a horse's hoofs on the high road. Gell, in high spirits, was galloping home.

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